

Twisted Tar Heel Tales: Blackbeard

Series: Twisted Tar Heel Tales



Ahoy, mates! I'm going to tell you about North Carolina's most famous and nastiest pirate, Blackbeard. He was a mean one, all right. He carried more guns and led more men than just about any other pirate of his time. Sometimes, to make himself even more horrible, he stuck slow-burning fuses in his wild beard. It was a terrifying sight, take it from me!

From 1716 to 1718 Blackbeard attacked at least twenty ships, from Boston to the Bahamas. He once stormed the city of Charleston, South Carolina, and demanded payment in medicine before he would

leave. He hid out along the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

In 1717 Blackbeard asked Governor Charles Eden to pardon him for his crimes. After he was pardoned, he moved to Bath, in Beaufort County, married, and gave up piracy. But that didn't last long. Within months he was back in business attacking and robbing ships.

Some people say that Blackbeard fell in love with Governor Eden's daughter. But she loved a handsome sailor and gave him her ring to wear. The jealous Blackbeard attacked the sailor's ship, charged on board, and cut off the sailor's hand that wore her ring. He put the hand, with the ring still on it, in a fancy silver box and sent it to Eden's daughter. She fainted when she opened the box and soon died of a broken heart.

That's a scary tale, even if part of it isn't true. Governor Eden didn't have a daughter, but he did have a stepdaughter. She had four husbands and lived to a ripe old age. But did Blackbeard really cut off her true love's hand? We'll never know!

In 1718 Virginia's governor offered a reward for the capture of Blackbeard, alive or dead. Two naval warships sailed to the pirate's island hideout at Ocracoke, Hyde County. The sixty sailors on board attacked Blackbeard and his crew. Some say it took twenty stab wounds and five gunshots to kill Blackbeard. That's how tough he was. After killing him, they cut off his head.

Some stories say that Blackbeard's head rolled into the sea and circled the ship three times looking for its body and yelling, "O crow, cock!" Blackbeard hoped a rooster would crow, because that meant morning was coming and there would be enough light for him to find his body. (This story explains how Ocracoke got its name.) But the sailors grabbed his head out of the water and hung it from the ship to warn other pirates. Some

people today report having seen the ghost of Blackbeard's head in the waters off Ocracoke, looking for its body.

Historians say some of the stories about Blackbeard are untrue or exaggerated. They sure are good and scary, though. Do you think they're true? If you ever visit Ocracoke, be sure to look for Blackbeard's head bobbing in the water. It might help you decide!